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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative case study was to examine the perceptions of one first-year instrumental music teacher (Tavia) regarding mentoring, induction, and the first year of teaching. This report represents a collaboration between teacher and researcher (Colleen) in an effort to understand mentoring, induction, and teaching in the first year as experienced in this specific setting. Data included: Tavia's handwritten journal, email communication between Tavia and her mentor, two observations of Tavia by Colleen, two interviews with Tavia, an interview with Tavia's principal, an interview with Tavia's mentor, Tavia's responses on an End of the First Year Questionnaire, and the audiotape from a meeting between Colleen and Tavia after Tavia's second year of teaching. Findings suggest that the beginning teacher mentor and induction support system was helpful and that music content support was important for Tavia. Discussion includes possible transferability of these findings to other beginning music teaching settings and recommendations for teaching practice and research. (Contains 33 references.) (Author/SM)

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Perceptions of an Instrumental Music Teacher Regarding Mentoring, Induction, and the First Year of Teaching

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Abstract

The purpose of this narrative case study was to examine the perceptions of one first-year instrumental music teacher (Tavia) regarding mentoring, induction and the first year of teaching. This report represents a collaboration between teacher (Tavia Zerman) and researcher (Colleen Conway) in an effort to understand mentoring, induction and teaching in the first year as experienced in this specific setting. Data included: Tavia's handwritten journal, email communication between Tavia and her mentor, two observations of Tavia by Colleen, two interviews with Tavia, an interview with Tavia's principal, an interview with Tavia's mentor, Tavia's responses on an End of The First Year Questionnaire, and the audiotape from a meeting between Colleen and Tavia after Tavia's second year of teaching.

Findings suggest that the beginning teacher mentor and induction support system was helpful and that music content support was important for Tavia. Discussion includes possible transferability of these findings to other beginning music teaching settings and recommendations for teaching practice and research.

Perceptions of an Instrumental Music Teacher Regarding Mentoring, Induction, and the First Year of Teaching

Assisting beginning teachers through induction and mentor support programs has been recommended as a teacher retention strategy in much of the teacher education research (Feiman-Nemser, 1993; Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999; Gold, 1996; Gratch, 1998; Griffin, 1999; Hawkey, 1997; Huling-Austin, 1990, 1992, 1994; Kester & Marockie, 1987; Kilgore & Kozisek, 1989; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Stewart, 1992; and Thies-Sprinthall & Reiman, 1997). Of concern to music educators (and other arts educators) is that fact that these studies did not examine data specific to music teachers (or other specialists). Conway, Krueger, Robinson, Haack and Smith (2002) suggest that the research which forms the basis for educational policy may not reflect the needs of the beginning music teacher population. There is an emerging research base regarding the beginning music teacher (Conway, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2003a; Conway & Garlock, 2002; DeLorenzo, 1992; Krueger, 1996, 1999, 2000; Montague, 2000, and Smith 1994) by which to inform policy and practice. All of these studies suggest that issues concerning mentoring and induction of beginning music teachers are highly contextual.

The purpose of this study was to examine one teaching context by exploring the perceptions of one first-year instrumental music teacher (Tavia) regarding mentoring, induction and the first year of teaching. Initial research questions included (a) How did Tavia describe her mentor, induction and early teaching experiences? (b) When and why did Tavia seek assistance from her mentor? (c) What were the perceptions of the assigned mentor teacher and Tavia's administrator regarding the beginning music

teacher mentor and induction process? and (d) What recommendations did participants have for beginning music teacher mentoring and induction?

This report represents a collaboration between teacher (Tavia Zerman) and researcher (Colleen Conway) in an effort to understand mentoring, induction and teaching in the first year as experienced in this specific setting.

Method

This study was conducted using a descriptive case study design (Merriam, 1988, 1998). My decision to choose Tavia as a case study participant represents what Patton (1990) would call "critical-case sampling" (p. 174). He says that

> Critical cases are those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things. A clue to the existence of a critical case is a statement to the effect that "if it happens there, it will happen anywhere" or, visa versa, "if it doesn't happen there, it won't happen anywhere." The focus of the data gathering in this instance is on understanding what is happening in that critical case. Another clue to the existence of a critical case is a key informant observation to the effect that "if that group is having problems, then we can be sure all the groups are having problems." (p. 174)

Tavia was a very strong student in her preservice work. It was my belief that she was one of the most well-prepared graduates to come from my institution at the time. She had student taught in the school district where she was hired. In the months before taking her first position, she had been substitute teaching alongside the previous band director who had injured her hand and needed assistance. Tavia's mentor was an experienced band director who had been teaching in the district for a long time. He was

well-respected by the music education profession. The school paid and trained the mentor teachers. At the outset of the school year I believed Tavia to be "set" to be successful. On the night before school started Tavia wrote:

Well, school starts tomorrow. I think I expected I would be more nervous than I actually am right now. I'm feeling kind of numb (although that may have to do with the fact that I worked 13 hours today!). I'm as ready as I'm going to be...decorations are laminated and hung, handouts are run and separated out for each class (with some extras of course), greeting is on the board. I still have lots of projects to work on...music filing, going through bags of stuff from the former teacher. But, the stuff I need for my first day is done. I kind of had fun decorating. (journal entry 8-21-00)

Tavia's participation in this study as the writer of her "story" is also narrative research (Conway, 2003b). With regard to the use of biographical stories in the study of teacher development, Carter and Doyle (1996) state:

> Overall, work that is grounded in a biographical perspective involves intense and extended conversations with teachers (see Woods 1985) and is based on the premise that the act of teaching, teachers' experiences and the choices they make, and the process of learning to teach are deeply personal matters inexorably linked to one's identity and, thus, one's life story. From this perspective, a central focus on teachers' personal lives is considered essential in designing and conducting research, interpreting data, and formulating policy regarding school reform and the education of teachers at all levels of schooling and stages of their careers. (p. 120)

As I observed Tavia in the early months of her teaching and communicated with her regularly about her experiences I saw her working very hard to be "good" at teaching. She was reflective regarding what she could do to be better with her students:

I learned something from my 8th graders today....having something due after you've only told them once and had a day off in between is a bad idea. (journal 8-24-00)

Next year I hope that I will be prepared for things further in the future than I was this year. I am much more comfortable when I am more than 20 minutes ahead of the kids. (end of year questionnaire, 6-00)

Although I believe that Tavia may be atypical of many beginning teachers in that she was able to reflect on and write about important issues of teaching and learning, I believe that some of her experiences may be common to other beginning music teachers, and thus, worthy of discussion.

Classroom Setting

Tavia teaches sixth, seventh and eighth grade instrumental music at Hayes Middle School in Grand Ledge, Michigan. The Grand Ledge school district serves a large geographic area that includes suburban and rural families of varying socioeconomic levels. The community is highly supportive of the schools, especially in the areas of athletics, academics and music. Hayes Middle School is the larger of two in the district and has approximately 750 students in grades six, seven and eight. The school aspires to a true middle school concept through the use of academic teams and pods at each grade level, creating multiple communities within the building. The students have had general music throughout their elementary school years and are first given the opportunity to elect band as sixth graders. Usually there are approximately 80

beginning band members. Students have many extra-curricular music activities available to them, including a strong local private lesson program that is partially subsidized for middle school students by grants from the music boosters association. Performing ensembles generally attain high musical levels and normally more than half of the students that begin in 6th grade will continue on into high school band. When Tavia began in the Fall of 2000, she replaced a teacher who had been at Hayes for over 30 years and had built a strong tradition for instrumental music.

Induction and Mentor Policy Context

The state policy in Michigan regarding beginning teachers requires districts to provide two programs:

> Sec. 1526. For the first 3 years of his or her employment in classroom teaching, a teacher shall be assigned by the school in which he or she teaches to 1 or more master teachers, or college professors or retired master teachers, who shall act as a mentor or mentors to the teacher. During the 3-year period, the teacher shall also receive intensive professional development induction into teaching, based on a professional development plan that is consistent with the requirements of section 3a of article II of Act No. 4 of the Public Acts of the Extra Session of 1937, being section 38.83a of the Michigan Compiled Laws, including classroom management and instructional delivery. During the 3-year period the intensive professional development induction into teaching shall consist of at least 15 days of professional development, the experiencing of effective practices in university-linked professional development schools, and

regional seminars conducted by master teachers and other mentors.(Michigan Department of Education, 1994)

The guidelines go on to clarify that the 15 inservice days for induction are to be in addition to other inservice days attended by all teachers. The school district where Tavia is employed provided six and a half days in the first year that were specific to new teachers. The first day and a half was within the district and served the purpose of teaching about specific district policies and procedures. The other five days were through a program run by the County Intermediate School District and included topics such as the first day of school, classroom management, preparing for a substitute teacher, student-led conferences, and topics as requested by the participants in the workshops. After the first year, no new-teacher-specific inservice days were provided by the district. Tavia was able to attend music conferences and count these towards her beginning teacher professional development.

Data Sources and Analysis

Tavia kept a written journal of her thoughts in the early months of her teaching which included approximately 75 handwritten pages. She and her mentor did most of their communication by email resulting in approximately 30 pages of emails sent between October 2000 and May 2001.

I interviewed Tavia at her school in October 2000 and again in April 2001. In the October interview I observed her as she taught one of her classes and then interviewed her for approximately one hour. I returned in the Spring to observe her teaching again and conduct a second interview. In addition, Tavia responded to a seven item open response questionnaire regarding her first year experiences at the end of the first year.

I interviewed Tavia's assigned mentor teacher and her building principal in May 2001. These two separate interviews lasted approximately one hour each and focused on perceptions of Tavia and her mentor and induction experiences. Although the findings presented in this paper are based primarily on the data from Tavia directly, when Tavia and I met in 2002 and began to draw meaning from all of her interactions, the transcripts from the mentor and principal data informed our conversation.

Tavia and I met in June of 2002 (after the end of her second year teaching) to review the data from her first year and begin to draw meaning from the representations of the interactions from her first year of teaching (all the data sets). After her second year, Tavia was able to bring a more reflective analysis of the data then she could have immediately after the first year. This discussion was preserved on tape. In making decisions regarding which findings from our analysis would be most relevant for the Arts and Learning SIG, Tavia and I decided to focus on the following themes: being overwhelmed and concerned regarding my ability to continue in the position; induction and professional development provided by the district; the mentoring experience; and why I've continued into my third year.

Findings Related to Teacher Development in Arts and Learning

In this presentation of findings we highlight themes which may be relevant to others in the "arts and learning" community. The reader is encouraged to remember that at the outset of this study in the Fall of 2000 Tavia was identified by me as a "critical case." I believed that Tavia was as set for success as is possible for a beginning middle school instrumental music teacher. Tavia's principal and mentor both discussed Tavia's strength going into the position. Thus, issues identified by her as problematic are most

likely even more serious for the "average" beginning teacher and some of the ways in which Tavia was able to help herself may be more difficult for the average beginner.

Being Overwhelmed and Concerned Regarding My Ability to Continue in the Position

Tavia wrote daily in her journal from the night before the first day of school (August 21, 2000) through the holiday break (12-21-00). Each entry in August, September, and October was approximately three paragraphs. In November and December, as she became completely overwhelmed by the job, Tavia stopped writing and only kept track of the number of hours she was at school which included (per week): 55, 67, 69, 45, 50, 24, and 17 hours. There was a snow day in the week with 24 hours. The week with 17 hours included a snow day and a two-day inservice conference (not counted in her hours).

The following excerpts from Tavia's journal illustrate her feelings of being overwhelmed and concerned. There were other themes present in the journal, including signs of the positive experiences of her position. However, at least in the early months of the job, the "overwhelmed and concerned" entries far outweighed the positive ones:

Is overwhelmedness a word? It is now 6:00 and I just got home. I hate the fact that my planning period is second hour...(8-27-00)

I wonder if it is normal to feel conflicted about a job like this at the end of the day. On the one hand, it is a great feeling to be getting to know and connecting with these kids. On the other hand, I'm completely exhausted. (8-31-00)

I swear I am on an emotional roller coaster with this job. Yesterday I was in tears thinking I just want out now and never teach again. Today, I just don't know.(9-11-00)

I don't think it would matter if I made twice the money I am making now...I don't want to work these hours. I have discovered what attracted me to teaching in the first place, but unfortunately it's a minuscule part of my whole job. I'm just tired. (9-20-00)

I guess it would be a waste of my education and ability if I quit at the end of this year...almost like giving up. However, I'm SURE that this job does not fit with the kind of life I want to have. I guess this is a good way for me to figure out my priorities. (10-1-00)

I hate being like this. I normally can find the positive in my life no matter what is going on, but that's getting more difficult. Especially on Sunday nights....I absolutely dread going back. (10-22-00)

In reflecting on those first few months now, Tavia writes:

> *Over the past few years I have been working hard at streamlining my job. This includes putting procedures into place for classroom management, paperwork, grading and other such details. Now that I have a new baby I am increasingly glad that I have put effort into this and will continue to try to find ways of making my job easier and, more importantly, less time consuming. Fortunately the enjoyable parts of the job are now in better balance with the negative aspects for me.*

Members of the "Arts and Learning" community must continue to focus on strategies for supporting beginning arts teachers through the difficult early months. Although Tavia will share in the next two sections that she had some appropriate induction support and an ideal mentor relationship, she still experienced severe moments of doubt and concern in the early months. When one considers my perception

of Tavia as extremely prepared for teaching, the situation becomes even more of a concern. Not all beginning music teachers are as prepared as Tavia, nor do they have the induction and mentor support she was given and *still*, she struggled.

Induction and Professional Development Provided by the District

I was particularly interested in Tavia's perceptions of her district-sponsored professional development for beginning teachers program. I was collecting data for several of my other studies at the same time as this study and had heard many teachers speak of dissatisfaction with their district-sponsored induction programs. I had heard many of those same teachers complain about general education course work as undergraduate students and was concerned that some of the problem was the inability of the beginning music teacher to make connections to general educational issues. I knew going in to this study that Tavia had valued her education course work and was the type of intellectual who was able to make the necessary connection between music and general education.

Tavia's reactions to the district-sponsored professional development courses for teachers were mixed. Positive comments such as "My experiences were good" (entry on End of Year Questionnaire) and "Some of what we did was helpful" (Fall interview) were mixed with comments such as "The first induction session was on the MEAP (state test) and was not especially helpful for me" (journal, 8-25-00) and "Professional development day on Thursday. That was useless. We really did nothing but talk about what was going well and what wasn't, and I felt like I got blown off a little when I shared that my concert went well. Wasn't relevant, I guess" (journal, 10-22-00).

In reflecting on these comments now Tavia suggests:

In the workshops I attended, I found some parts useful, some not. What I found interesting is that my non-music teacher colleagues had the same reaction. I feel the best way to approach this kind of learning situation is to go in with the understanding that I may not be able to use all of it, but the attitude that I will try to get everything possible out of the experience. For example, there was a lot of emphasis on "best practices" procedures, some of which are not applicable to all aspects of music learning. I've learned to pick and choose from what is offered at most district professional development activities.

Although there were some positive experiences and Tavia clearly shows a healthy attitude towards her professional development, of particular concern to me is that Tavia's district provides one of the more extensive (and expensive!) induction programs in the state. Even so, Tavia expressed a desire to be provided with opportunities to interact with other music teachers. She wanted professional development experiences which focused specifically on strategies for music classrooms. Her comments regarding the reactions of her non-music colleagues towards the induction program support issues that the general teacher education induction community is just beginning to address regarding the success of generic teacher induction programs (Achinstein, 2003).

The Mentoring Experience

Tavia took it upon herself to seek an experienced teacher mentor. Comments regarding the pairing of Tavia with her mentor early on include:

We talked for quite some time about what I see happening/continuing with the program and all sorts of other things...I decided that I really want to have Rick as a

mentor, so when I got back to Hayes, I sent an email to that effect to the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel. (journal 8/25/00)

Not all first year teachers are afforded the opportunity to choose their own mentor. Not all first year teachers would be organized enough to find one. Tavia had student-taught in the district, so she already had a sense of who was who. In Tavia's case, I believe the policy to chose a mentor helped create a successful experience for her.

Tavia and Rick generated over 30 pages of emails from October 2000 - May 2001. In addition, they met in person every few weeks. The content of their discussion was primarily curricular. For example:

What do you do when one of your beginning classes moves faster than the other? Do you let them go? Try to catch the other class up? Any recommendations would be appreciated. The differences between my two classes right now are amazing. (Email 12-14-00)

Would you be able to come over some time this week and we can have a meeting with the agenda of checking to make sure I haven't over programmed for band festival? (email 1-21-01)

Rick teaches in the same school district and is teaching the same content (instrumental music) to the same age group (6th-8th grade). This enabled Tavia to bring her concerns about music teaching and learning to her mentor. If Tavia had been working with a non-music mentor, she could not have asked for strategies for teaching to individual differences or suggestions for concert programming. There were some suggestions for improvement in the mentoring relationship put forth by both Tavia and Rick. Rick was never able to observe Tavia in her teaching and he suggested that this

lack of context made his assistance, particularly in terms of classroom management issues difficult:

> *Right now she draws a scenario about something that happened for me and I go from that, but if I was actually in there, then I could give her the specific feedback. So it just would be a lot easier if I was there.* (Spring mentor interview, 2001)

I consider Tavia's mentor experience the best I have seen in my work with beginning teachers and mentors (Conway, 2003a). I believe the lesson to be learned for the "Arts and Learning" community from Tavia's experience is that a strong mentor will help a beginning teacher to get over the hurdles and stay in the profession. Tavia is no longer talking about leaving the profession. I attribute some of that to her mentor relationship.

Why I've Continued Into My Third Year.

I've said from the beginning that if I ever end up quitting this job, it won't be because of the students. Maybe the paperwork or the bureaucratic garbage, but definitely not the students. That is the single most important reason I continue to do this job…I love my students. Making music with them is just like icing on the cake for me. It is a passion I have, but the students have become my foremost inspiration to continue, especially now that I have a baby. If I did not enjoy my job, there is no way I would be returning because there is a big part of me that would like nothing more than to stay home with my daughter. I feel like my students are all my kids too, and don't like the idea of deserting them. I get to do something that none of the other teachers in my building get to do, and that is to see the same group of kids every school day for

three whole years. It's an amazing thing to watch them grow...musically of course, but also physically and emotionally. I feel that the rewards outweigh the difficulties.

Not only has Tavia continued into her third year but she continues to develop as a leader in the instrumental music profession. She continues to communicate with her mentor and other instrumental music professionals regarding important issues of teaching and learning music. Would Tavia have been successful without her mentor? Would she have continued in the profession? I imagine that she would have continued and been successful. However, when I read her journal and listen to her interviews and get a sense of the true struggle in the early months I am grateful that Tavia had someone to talk to about her experiences. The "Arts and Learning" community must inform policy-makers and program designers that music and other arts teachers face challenges that are not faced in other classrooms. Tavia's classes are larger than classroom teachers so classroom management is different for her. She is the only instrumental music teacher in the building so isolation is even more severe. Success for many music teachers (Tavia included) is measured by their communities in terms of public performance, and competitions. Choosing concert literature and planning lessons for music courses is driven by content. Generic beginning teacher programs alone do not provide the right kind of support.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The power to address the issues facing beginning music and arts teachers rests with policy-makers in state education departments. Arts educators must make their voices heard on committees which develop and evaluate policies regarding beginning teachers. My experience with state education departments has been that they are often are

unaware of the issues facing arts educators and may be willing to consider our needs if they were aware of them.

I believe the most powerful finding of this study to be that content-support is a necessity for beginning music teachers. However, it is often difficult for school districts to provide this support. Thus, the solution to the content issue may be for educational stake-holders from outside the school district to be involved in the mentor and induction process. Conway, Krueger, Robinson, Haack, and Smith (2002) suggest that several states are exploring the notion that university faculty should be key players in the mentor and induction process. Universities in Michigan, for example, are being asked by the state to document their interactions with and support of teacher education graduates. Funding is inevitably a major issue in University program development. Universities rarely have the resources to follow their graduates into the field with mentoring programs. In addition, if university professors are to be able to help in the field, these responsibilities must become part of their regular teaching load. The ability to maintain continuity into the field (with the mobility of new teachers as well as university professors) may be an additional stumbling block in the development of mentoring programs that include university personnel.

A more feasible solution may be for state music organizations to provide for beginning music teachers. Many states are already exploring these options. However, funding for these programs and personnel for organizing them is inevitably a challenge. Although there are philosophical issues to address and logistical challenges to overcome, the induction and mentoring of beginning music and arts teachers must remain at the fore front of the arts education policy and research arena. Future

researchers in arts and learning may consider the following questions: What are the specific areas of content-support identified by beginning music teachers?; Can arts teachers be provided with induction support that is meaningful for all arts areas, or do music, visual art, theater, and dance need completely separate programs?; How do we evaluate induction programs that are being provided by state organizations?; How do we measure the impact of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher retention and job satisfaction?; How do we make connections between beginning music teacher induction and mentoring and student achievement in music?; and What is the role of cultural variables which interact with a beginning teacher's support system (former teachers, other teachers in the school, spouse, friends, etc.)?

The use of narrative inquiry in this study provides information regarding one teacher's perceptions of her beginning music teacher experiences. The "Arts and Learning" community must continue to conduct research in collaboration with teachers so that we may begin to have a better understanding of teaching and learning from the music and arts classroom perspective. I know that my teaching has changed since my work with Tavia. I address issues of beginning teachers with all of my student teachers. I encourage them to be proactive in securing appropriate mentor and induction support.

Beginning teacher induction and mentoring are not merely about retaining teachers in the field. These programs aspire to fostering growth in beginning teachers so that they emerge from the induction phase as reflective master music teachers. Tavia has been able to emerge in this way, and it is my hope that the profession can see to it that all beginning music and arts teachers are able to do the same.

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